



## Special Studies and Evaluation

Office of Policy and Evaluation  
California Department of Education

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### Evaluation of California's Standards-Based Accountability System

In June 1998, the California Department of Education (CDE) awarded a \$200,000 contract to WestEd, in collaboration with Management Analysis and Planning (MAP), to conduct an evaluation of California's Standards-Based Accountability System. The evaluation examined the processes and impact of the Standards-Based Accountability System in school districts statewide and the relationship of this system to school district efforts to improve student performance. The evaluation was completed in November 1999.

#### Background

The Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) was passed in 1994 as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The accountability provisions of IASA Title I require that state education agencies develop challenging content and performance standards and have annual assessments aligned with those standards.

In order to meet federal requirements of IASA Title I, a statewide Standards-Based Accountability System was established in 1997 by CDE in accordance with the IASA State Plan.<sup>1</sup> Central to this system were data reporting requirements which included as part of the Consolidated Application a description of the district's assessment and accountability system and student achievement data (using multiple measures) for all schools according to the district's local grade level standards.

California initiated the first stages of the Standards-Based Accountability System during the 1996-97 school year. For the 1998-99 school year, school level reports of student achievement using multiple measures were required for:

- All Title I schools, including charter schools;
- All schools in Coordinated Compliance Review

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<sup>1</sup> Information about Standards-Based Accountability System is located on the CDE web site at: <[www.cde.ca.gov/iasa/standards](http://www.cde.ca.gov/iasa/standards)>.

(CCR) districts including charter schools; and

- All schools wishing to enter the Distinguished Schools, National Blue Ribbon Schools, or Achieving Schools competitions.

As of April 1999 with the passage of the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 (PSAA),<sup>2</sup> the context for school accountability changed, and Consolidated Application accountability reporting was no longer required. Instead, PSAA legislative mandates call for the development of an Academic Performance Index (API) and rewards and interventions over the long term.

This study of the Standards Based-Accountability System, the precursor to the PSAA, documents state and local accountability implementation, processes, and impacts of the last three years. It also describes viewpoints about the emerging PSAA legislation.

#### Scope of the Study

The study addressed the following major evaluation questions:

1. What is the nature of local content and performance standards in language arts and mathematics and how do they compare with state standards? What mechanism does the district use to compare its standards with the state's model standards?
2. What is the nature of local assessments for standards-based accountability and how are they used to determine whether a student has met or has not met the local standards?
3. How are data from local accountability systems used?

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<sup>2</sup> Information about PSAA is located on the CDE website at: <[www.cde.ca.gov/psaa](http://www.cde.ca.gov/psaa)>.

4. What practices or features of a district's standards and accountability system are associated with particular educational outcomes and practices?
5. What practices of local education agencies, the state education agency, and other education-related institutions and assistance centers help or hinder schools in implementing their standards and accountability systems?
6. What obstacles do schools face in implementing a standards-based accountability system and how can local education agencies, the state education agency, and other educational institutions and assistance centers help schools in overcoming those obstacles?

### **Design of the Study**

The evaluation involved the following major data collection activities:

- Review of a sample of state accountability documents, district accountability plans, current state standards, and assessment instruments.
- Interviews with selected state officials.
- Administration of a questionnaire relating to local accountability plans and practices to a sample of district personnel.
- Interviews with selected district and school staff.

### **Report of Findings**

The report of findings and recommendations was completed in November 1999 and is located on the CDE web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ope/sse>.

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This summary was prepared by Special Studies and Evaluation (SSE), Office of Policy and Evaluation, California Department of Education. The summary and other information about services and products are located on the Office of Policy and Evaluation web site within the "Special Studies and Evaluation" unit at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ope/sse>.